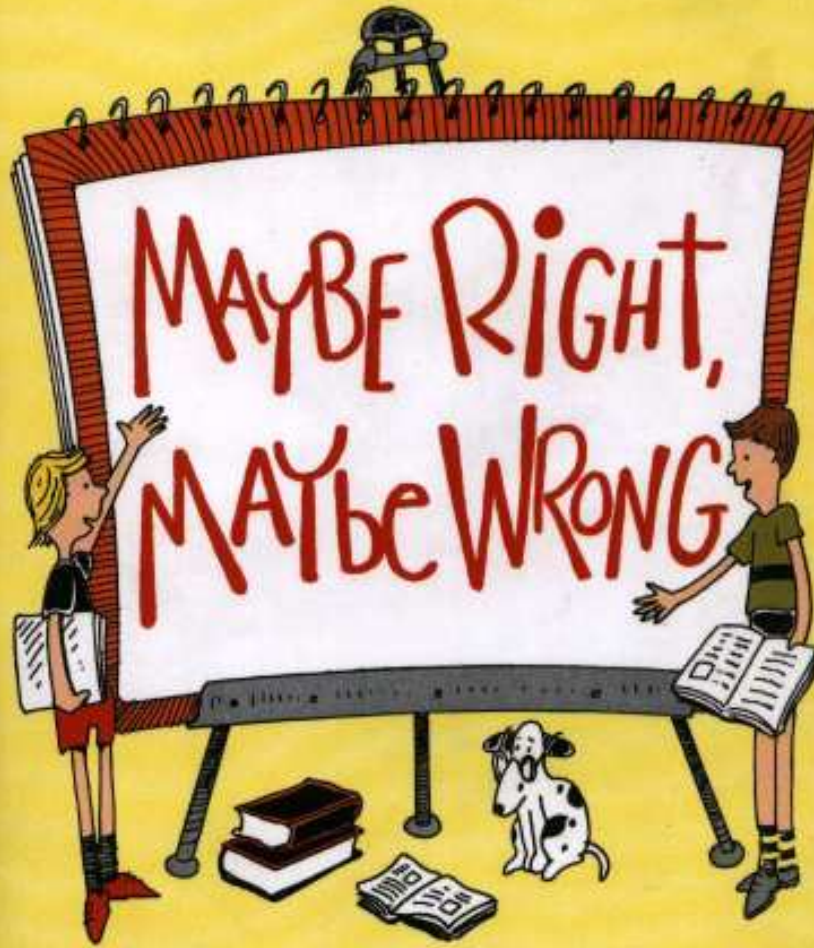


A Guide for YOUNG THINKERS



by Dan Barker

ILLUSTRATED BY
BRIAN STRASSBURG

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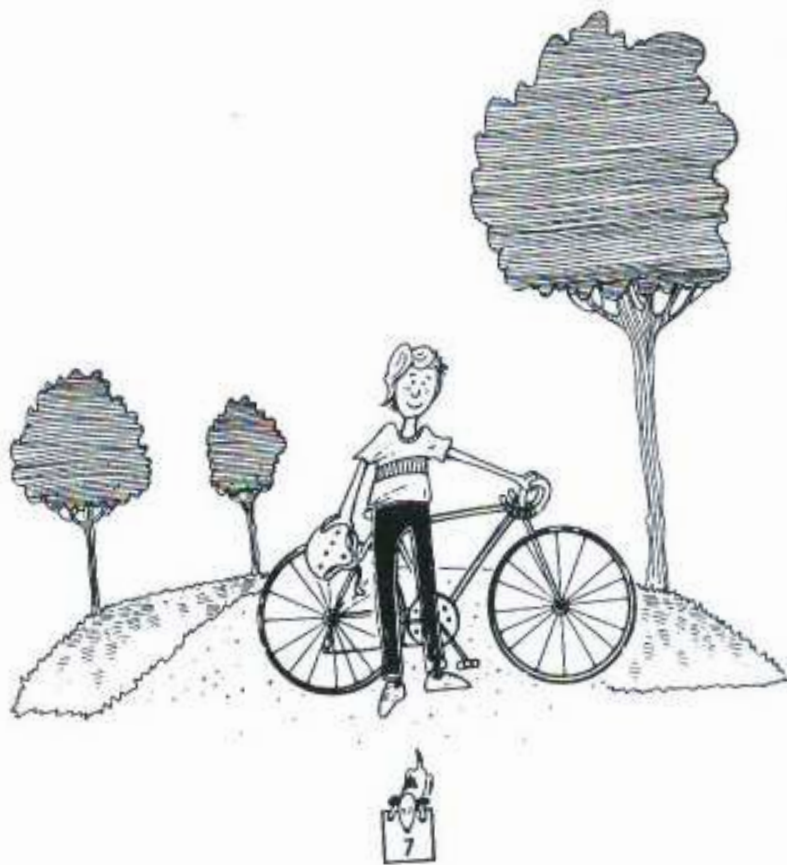
MAYBE RIGHT, MAYbe WRONG

by Dan Barker

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This is Andrea.
Andrea has a good mind.
She is learning the difference between right
and wrong.



Andrea has learned that there is nothing more
important than human beings.



Andrea never tries to hurt another person and feels sorry when accidents happen.



When possible, she tries to stop the pain of others.



Andrea decides what is right or wrong by thinking about how her actions might hurt or help other human beings.

She does not think fighting is right.

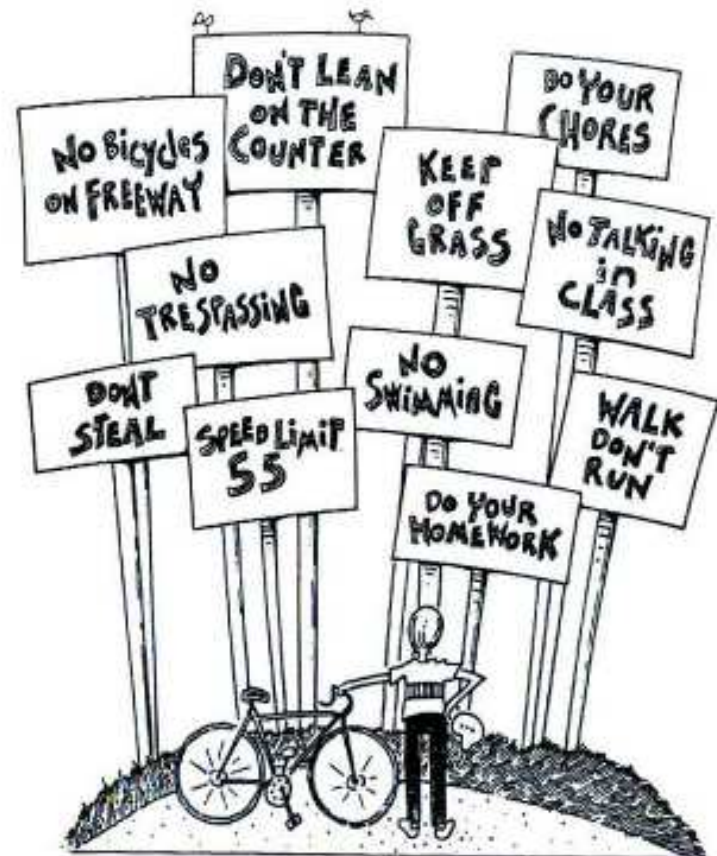
Fighting only causes more harm and makes the problem worse, not better.

Usually the bravest and best thing to do is to walk away from a fight.



Some people use **rules** to decide what is right or wrong.

A rule is a command that you are supposed to obey all the time.



But Andrea uses **principles** to decide what is right or wrong.

A principle is an **idea**, not a command.

A principle does not tell you what to **do**.

A principle tells you how to **think** about what to do.



Rules are not supposed to be broken.

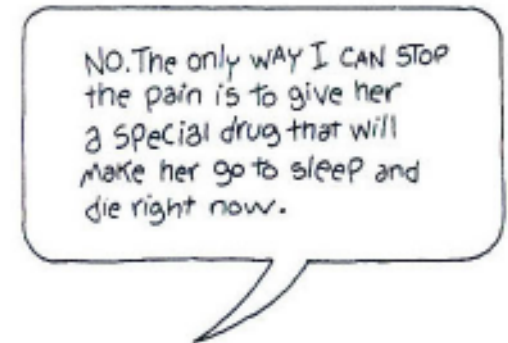
But principles **can** be broken.

A principle can be broken by a more important principle.



Sometimes it is not easy to know what to do.

One day Andrea's cat got hit by a car, and Andrea had to make a tough decision.



Andrea doesn't know what to do because she has two different principles, but she can only use one of them.



One principle says that you shouldn't take life.

But another principle says that you should try to stop pain.

These are both very good principles.

But the only way Andrea can follow the second principle is to break the first principle.

And the only way she can follow the first principle is to break the second principle.

What would **you** do?

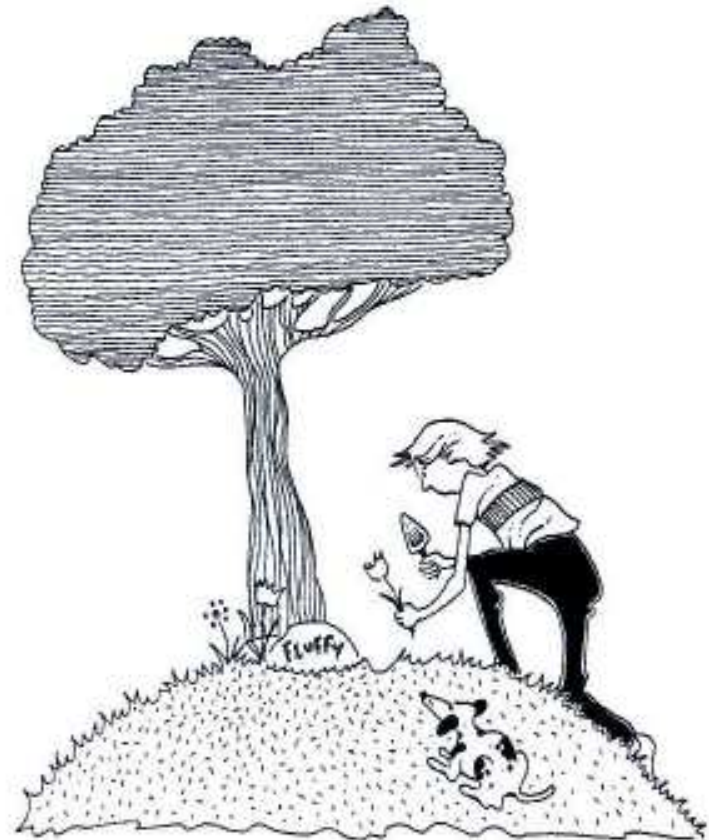


It is a good idea to check the facts and to be very certain that you know as much as possible before you make a final decision.



Most people would feel very uncomfortable making this decision because there is no happy answer.

Most people would feel that stopping the pain is most important because Fluffy is going to die anyway.



There was no rule to tell Andrea what to do in this case.

She had to think carefully about it.

She had to decide what principles are most important.

She had to learn all of the facts before making her decision.

If things were different, maybe she would have made a different decision.

Principles are more important than rules.

Following rules usually does not take any thought, but principles have to be thought about carefully.

Rules come from an authority, such as a parent, teacher, boss, king, or government.

A rule that comes from the government is usually called a **law**.

A rule that comes from a religion is usually called a **commandment**.



Some good people believe in a god.

Some good people do not believe in a god.

But the way to know what is right or wrong comes from learning what is best for humans, not what is best for a god.



Human beings are a part of nature.

We are not better than nature.

A human being is a very special kind of animal.

Since we are a part of nature, we should respect all of nature, not just human beings.

This includes all of the other animals and the world that we live in.



Your actions are very important.

If you want to live a good, healthy, and happy life, you should choose your actions carefully.

This is sometimes called **morality**.

Morality is how you decide what actions are right or wrong, good or bad, better or worse.

Having morality is the same as having good principles.



To follow good principles sometimes means that you will do things that you don't want to do.

You do them because they are the right thing to do.



Just because something is a rule does not make it right.

If a rule can be explained by a good principle, then it is a good rule.

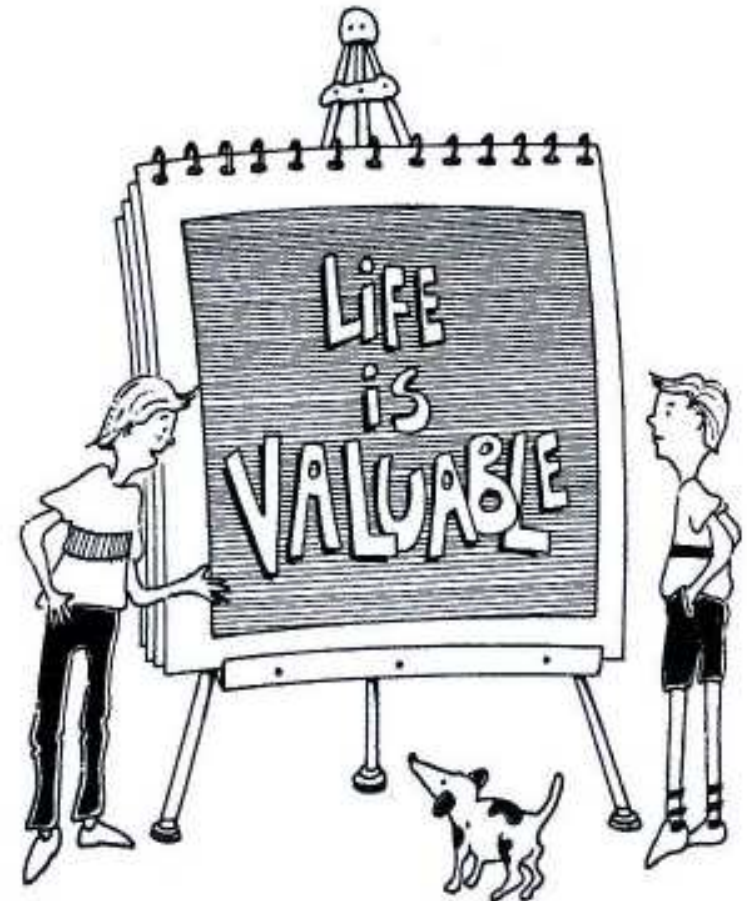
There are many good rules and good laws.

But if a rule does not have a good principle, then it is a bad rule or an unnecessary rule.



The most important principle is:

Life is valuable.



You should never try to hurt another living thing.

You should never try to hurt another person.

You should never try to hurt yourself.

Some people think that the reason killing is wrong is because a god or a government has said: "You should not kill."

But if they are going to follow a command that says you should **not** kill, then they might also follow a command that says you **should** kill.

Millions of people have killed other people in wars because they think a god told them to do it. This is wrong.



When possible, you should try to stop the pain of others.

If you have to hurt someone, then hurt them as little as possible.

Good people do not want to fight. But sometimes you might have to fight to protect yourself or to protect someone else from getting hurt.

If you do have to hurt someone, then try to stop as soon as possible. A good person does not enjoy causing pain.



Another principle:

Respect the rights of others.



You do not have to love everyone.

You do not have to like everyone.

You do not have to respect everyone.

But you should always try to respect the **rights** of everyone.

Some human rights are:

The right to food, clothing, and shelter.

The right to have your own thoughts and beliefs.

The right to speak your own thoughts and beliefs.

The right to privacy.

The right to freedom.



For example, just because you catch someone breaking the law does not mean you have the right to hurt them.



Another good principle is:

Try to be fair with everyone.



Fairness means giving everyone the same chance or the same amount.

Fairness means that you don't treat people differently because they are different.



Fairness means that boys and girls should be treated the same.

It means that men and women should be treated the same.



It means that people of different color should be treated the same.

It means that people of different religions should be treated the same.

Fairness means that you should not treat someone badly just because of their looks.

Or because of their height or weight.

Or because of their age.

Or because of their handicap.

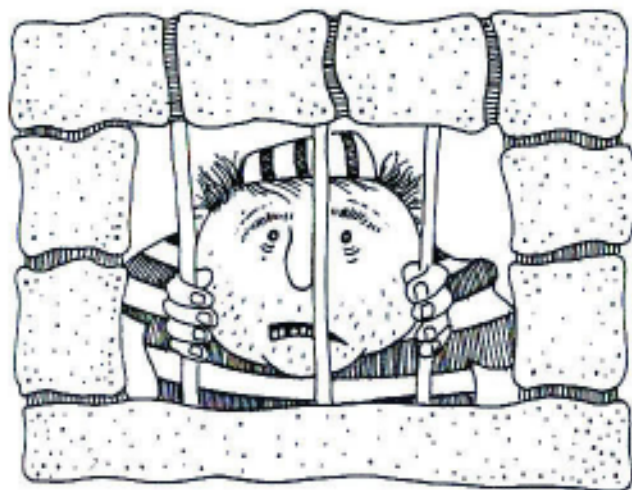
Or because of the country they come from.

Or because they are poor or rich.



The only time people should be treated differently is when they break the law or when they hurt other people.

If someone breaks the law or hurts other people, then it is fair to treat them in a way that helps them to change their bad actions or keeps them from hurting others.



Another principle is:

Always try to tell the truth.



Sometimes a good way to know if something is wrong is to ask yourself if you can tell anyone about it.

If you feel that you have to keep a secret, then the action might be wrong.

If an adult tells you that you should keep a secret and never tell anyone about it, then this means that the adult is probably doing something wrong.

For example, if an adult or bigger kid touches you where you don't want to be touched, this is wrong because it does not respect your right to decide what to do with your own body.



Not all secrets are bad. When you are planning a surprise party for someone, it is okay to keep it a secret from the person.

A surprise party does not hurt anyone!



Sometimes it is okay not to be honest, such as when a really bad person wants to hurt you or another person.

This is a good example of how a principle can be broken.



Suppose a woman you know comes to your house and says that she needs somewhere to hide because her husband has been beating her up.

Suppose you agree to hide her in your house.

What if her husband comes to your house and asks if she is hiding there? Would you tell the truth?

Sometimes it is okay not to be honest.

In this case, the principle of saving a life is more important than the principle of always telling the truth.



It is also wrong to cheat other people.

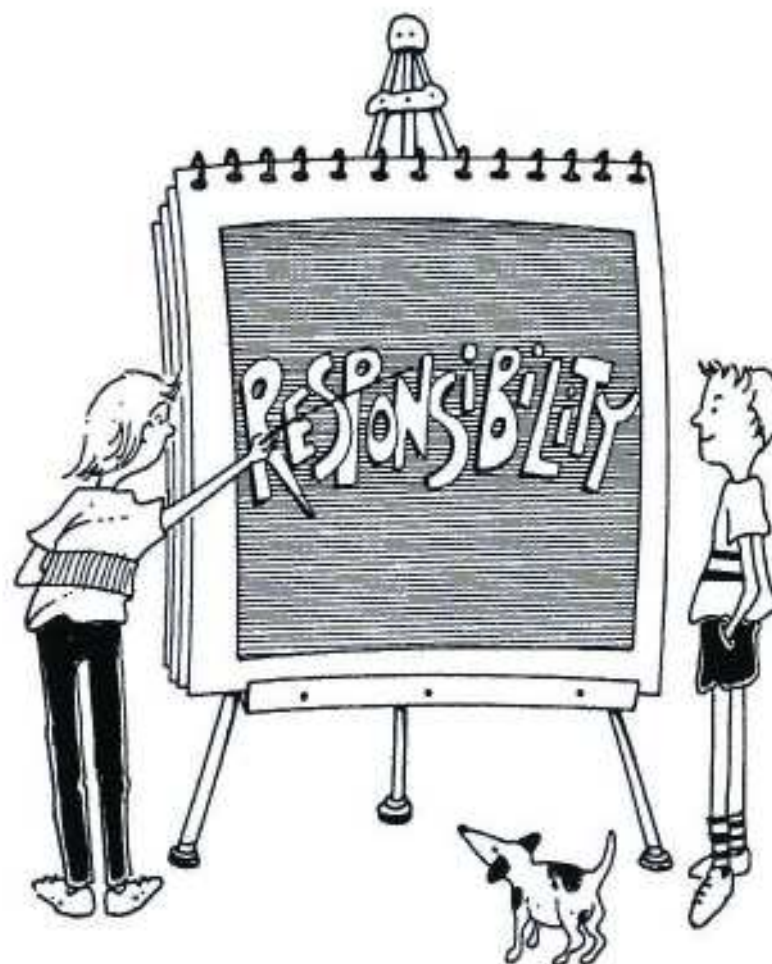
Cheating is not honest.

Cheating can hurt other people.



A very important principle is:

Try to be responsible.



Responsibility means that **you** should try to take care of the things in your own life.

You should not make other people take care of things for you.

If you say you will do something, do it.

If you make a promise, keep it.

If you hurt someone, apologize and try to stop the hurt.

If you **break** or destroy something, fix it or pay for it.



Life is not a free ride.

Good people try to pay their own way and work their own share.

Try to remember the important things in life.

Forgetting to take care of things is not responsible.

If you do something wrong, **you** try to make it right.

Another important principle is:

Try to be kind to other people.



When you are thinking about an action, it is easy to ask yourself,

“Is this kind?”

“Will another person appreciate what I am doing?”

“Is there a way to be nicer than this?”

There is nothing wrong with being selfish, if you don't hurt someone and if you treat people fairly.

But most good people think that it is nice to be nice.

Most good people enjoy helping other people.

Most good people enjoy giving pleasure to other people.



Some people are kind to other people because they want to be treated the same way themselves. This is sometimes called the Golden Rule, and it is not a bad rule.

But other people are kind because they think human beings are valuable, not because they want a reward.

Another principle is:

Always try to learn as much as you can.



You can't make good decisions if you don't have knowledge.

Before you can decide what action is right or wrong, you have to think about what might happen after you do it.



Maybe a certain action will hurt people.

Maybe it will help people.

Maybe it will do both.

Every time you do something, it makes something else happen.

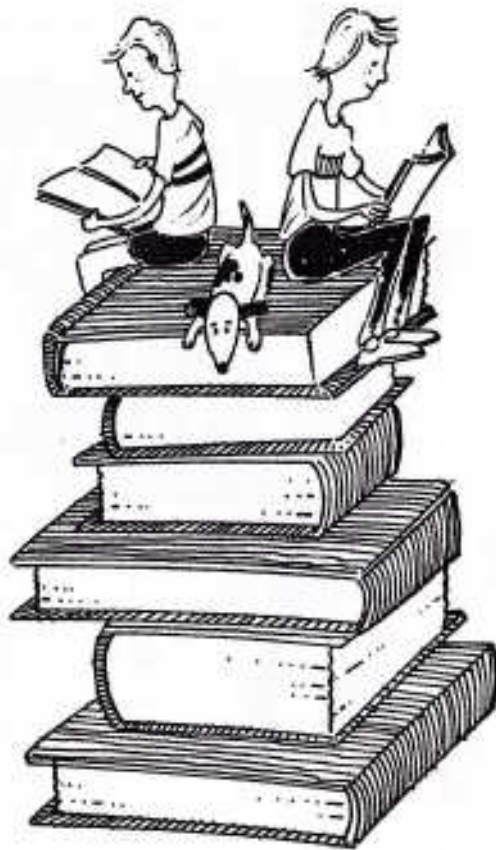
If you don't know what might happen, you can't make a good decision about what to do.



School is important.

Reading and learning are important.

The more you know, the better off you are.



A really fun principle:

Enjoy life!



Everyone on this earth, including you, should be allowed to enjoy life.

You only go through life once.

Instead of doing unpleasant things, try to make life fun for yourself and for others.

It is hard for good people to enjoy life when they know other people are hurting.

Try to help other people enjoy life also.



If your actions are causing another person not to be able to enjoy life, then maybe they are wrong.

If your actions are causing you not to enjoy your own life, then maybe they are wrong.

Most people enjoy play, relaxation, entertainment, movies, sports, and other fun things. Different people enjoy different things.

Some people enjoy worshiping in a church or temple.

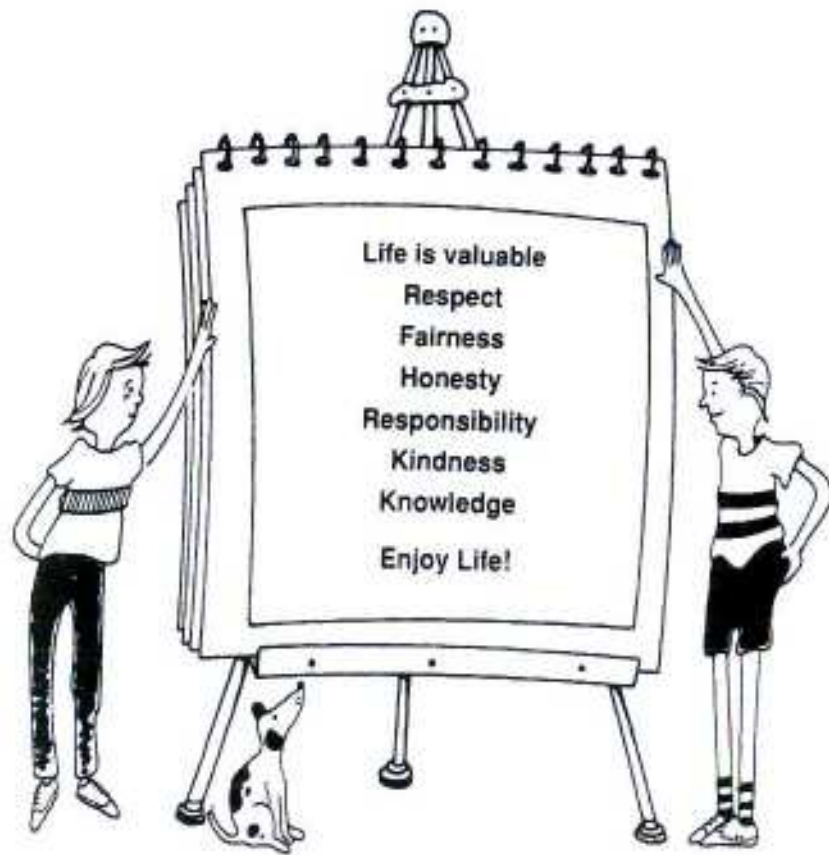
Some people do not enjoy worshiping.

But all good people agree that we should let everyone enjoy life in their own way.

We are all different, and we can all get along.



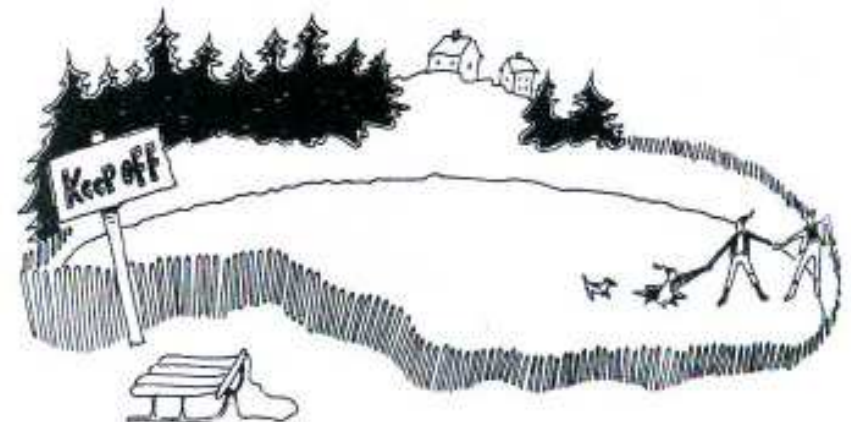
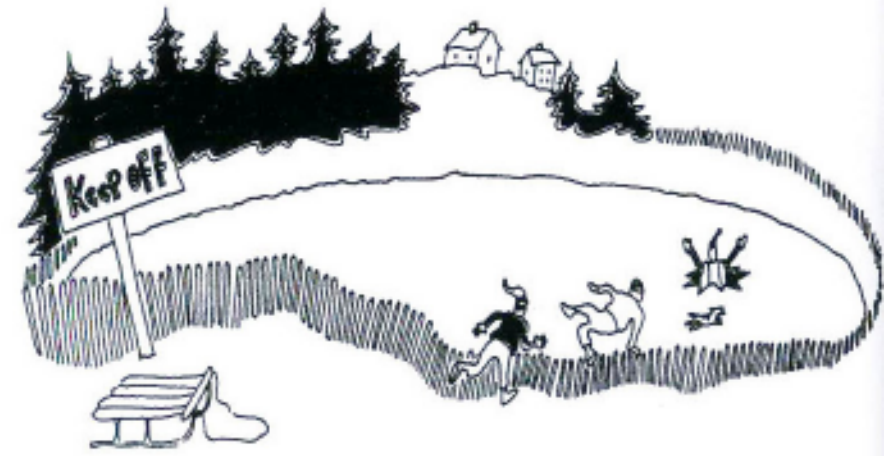
If you use these **principles**, then you will have an easier time deciding what is right or wrong.



Sometimes it is easy to know the right thing to do.



But sometimes it is not easy because the action you choose might break a rule or principle.



Sometimes you have to break a rule in order to help other people.

There is nothing wrong with breaking a rule, if there is a more important principle.



Sometimes it is very difficult to know what is the right thing to do.

Sometimes there is no right thing to do.

Sometimes you have to choose between two things that are **wrong**.

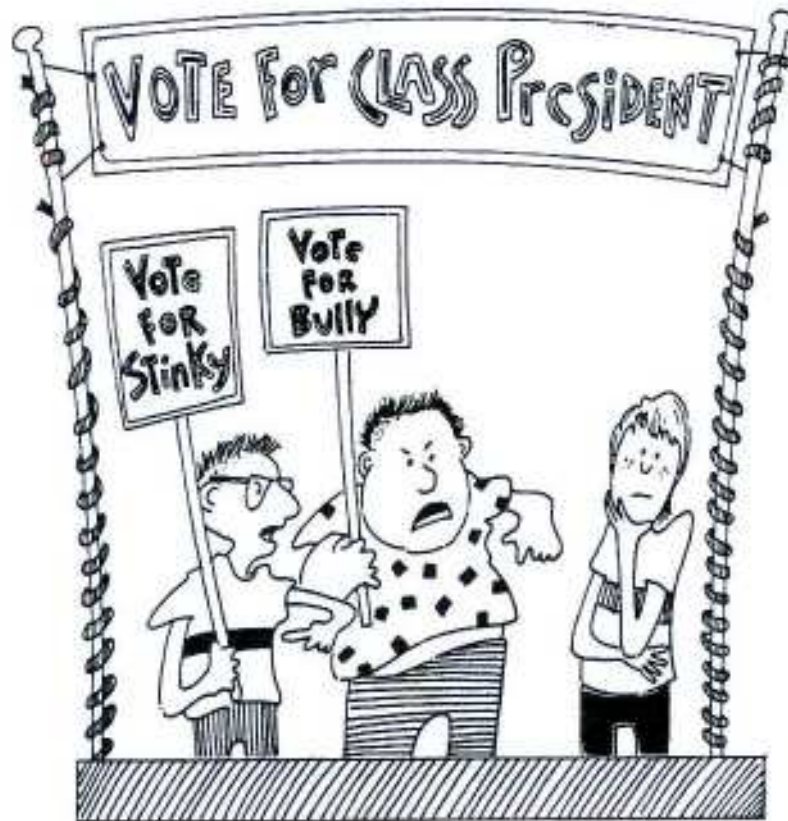
If you ever have to choose between two things that are wrong, then you can still think about which choice is better. Maybe one choice is not as wrong as another choice.

If you choose the action that is less wrong,
then you are making the **right** choice.

If you don't make any choice at all, then that might
help the **worse** choice to happen.

Most of the time it is not hard to know what to do.

But when it is hard to know what to do, you can
use principles to help you decide whether it is right
or wrong.



Like Andrea, you have a very good mind.

You can use your mind to think about principles to help you decide whether an action is right or wrong.



Maybe Right, Maybe Wrong affirms a child's ability to think, to seek information, and to ask "Why?" By using factually based information and the tools of critical thought, without recourse to dogma or holy books, the book's main character, Andrea, learns vital moral lessons. Her most important insight: Regardless of one's own beliefs, you should respect everybody's human rights. Through fun illustrations and an engaging narrative, *Maybe Right, Maybe Wrong* communicates to children on their level important principles of moral choice.

DAN BARKER, author, lecturer, and composer, is a regular contributor to *Freethought Today*. Brian Strassburg is a professional illustrator.

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